Delay in issuing passports

† 426. PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that much time is taken in issuing new passports and it even goes beyond the maximum time limit of five weeks;

(b) if so, the number of cases where it took more than five weeks and the percentage of such cases, out of the total passport issued; and

(c) whether Government hav* held any officer responsible for taking more than five weeks time in issuing passports, if so, the passport office-wise details of the last two years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) Passports are normally issued within a period of 4 to 5 weeks. However, in certain cases there have been instances of delay beyond the stipulated period. These are mainly due to non-receipt/incomplete or adverse Police Reports, furnishing of false/incomplete material information by the applicant, delayed supply of passport booklets by India Security Press, Nasik and are thus beyond the control of the passport issuing authorities.

Indian fishermen in Pakistan jails

427. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a number of Indian fishermen are languishing in Pakistan jails;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there are any bilateral agreement with the neighbouring countries to facilitate the safe handing over of such persons;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) if not, whether Government would initiate such bilateral agreements; and

(f) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) According to available information, there are 386 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails, all of whom were arrested between September, 2005 and February, 2006.

(c) to (f) During the India-Pakistan Foreign Secretary level talks held on December 27-28,2004, it was agreed that immediate notification would be provided to the respective High Commissions through the Foreign Ministries of the arrested Indian/Pakistani nationals, consular access would be given within three months from the date of their arrest and repatriation would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification. India and Pakistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (Moll) on October 03,2005 at Islamabad which provides for establishment of a communication link between Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA). The MoU, *inter alia,* provides for reporting of EEZ violations, exchange of information about apprehended vessels and coordination of return passages. The MoU will come into effect after ratification by both the Governments which is under process.

India and Sri Lanka have an Understanding on humane treatment and early release of fishermen which has been reiterated during the visit of Sri Lankan President to India in November, 2004 and subsequent high level contacts. A Joint Working Group (JWG) on fisheries has also been established which held its first meeting in April, 2005 and would pursue cooperation in fisheries sector.

With other neighbouring countries, the problems pertaining to arrest of Indian fishermen are very few. Whenever such cases arise, the matter is taken up with the Governments concerned through diplomatic channels for early release of the Indian fishermen.

Civil Nuclear Co-operation with USA

428. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reported statement of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that India has made "some difficult choices to secure approval of the civil-nuclear co-operation